

Examining VA Implementation of the Persian Gulf War Veterans Act. Of 1998

Michael D Woods

Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations

November 15, 2005

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify here this morning.

Before I begin I would like to dedicate my testimony to two warriors who are not with us here today. First, Navy Captain Michael Scott Speicher who has been missing since January 1991 the start of the Gulf War who is officially consider captured. Second, Army Sgt Matt Maupin who went missing in April 2004 during the Iraq War. No matter how difficult our struggles as Veterans may be they in know way compare to what these two men must be enduring for our country. I will remember them, and I hope Congress, and American public will, too.

In preparing my testimony for you today I was forced to look back at the many things that have happened with my health care since I returned home from the Gulf War in 1991. I considered writing a very long drawn out testimony of my very difficult experience with the VA. But with the limited amount of time we have here today I will summarize my experiences.

In looking back many Gulf War Veterans, including me, first made contact with the VA Through the VA Gulf War Registry exam process. You know how things went back then, VA's denial of medical problems, long waits just to see doctors who would tell us we should return in 15 – 20 years when science had time to catch up to our problems. Or to simply be told there was nothing wrong.

Since this time veterans have organized, we have worked hard over many years with Congress to try and force the VA to recognize and treat our illness. We have met with reporters, held meetings, organized conferences, and we have even held long road marches across our

county. We have worked close with veterans groups to press for enactment of the " Persian Gulf War Veterans Act of 1998 " Sponsored by you and many members of this committee.

Now let me talk about VA's failures after the enactment of the Persian Gulf War Veterans Act

Years ago I left the VA Health Care system after being prescribed a powerful medication by the VA obecalp. A medication to be used with caution. However it does not work very well Spelled in reverse it is simply Placebo. To answer your questions before they even begin. I have never participated in a medical study in my life, much less at the VA.

After leaving the VA and seeking care in the private medical sector. I found a good doctor and Neurologist who managed to control my declining health. Thankfully my wonderful wife Jessica has stuck with me over the years and has always ensured that I have received good medical care even if we had trouble paying for it.

Recently we sold our home in Florida and moved back to our home state of Kentucky. At which time I returned to the VA for my Health Care. My Wife and I felt that after everything that has been done over the years that surely the VA Health Care System has improved for Gulf War Veterans. But to my surprise, returning to the VA was like going back in time. I was once again told there is nothing wrong with Gulf War Veterans. Even worse the Doctor I saw on my last visit even stated that she cannot believe that Veterans receive compensation for Gulf War illnesses because there is nothing really wrong with them that relates to there service. She even refused to fill the prescriptions that have kept my illnesses from continuing to decline. I cannot believe after all the work that has been done on this issue that this is still the normal response from VA doctors. But when looking at there current training manual it should not surprise any of us.

In working with Undersecretary Jonathan Perlin I know that he for one truly cares about ill Gulf War Veterans. However there seems to be a break down between his comments and what the VA doctors do at VA hospitals and clinics. This is a break down that must be repaired.

When looking at VA claims and how the process works there is still much work to be done. After years of denials I finally was able to convince the VA to approve my undiagnosed illness claim. This came about as a result

of a round table discussion hosted by Congress Putnam of Florida when I discussed with the VA Regional Director why veterans with clear evidence showing undiagnosed neurological disorders were being denied benefits by his VA rating officers. I went on to explain that the laws and regulations clearly showed that they should be approved. He challenged me on this point, claiming they properly review all cases by their merit. At which time I produced a copy of a report done by my private doctor who is a neurologist and psychologist which clearly showed that I suffer many neurological problems to include motor nerve and sensory nerve neuropathy in all of my extremities with the worst being in my right leg, which now requires the use of a prosthetic brace to allow me to continue to walk. I also showed him reports from spinal taps done by the VA which show abnormal spinal fluid that the " Armed Forces Institute of Pathology " has been unable to diagnosis. This report does go on to say that these findings should be compared with clinical findings to rule out such things as MS, ALS, and Parkinson's disease just to name a few. The Regional Director said he would have to get back with on this. Several weeks later I did not hear from him but my claim was approved.

While sitting before you today I would like to urge you to consider the following recommendations.

First, Extend the time a veteran has to file for Presumption beyond the current 10 year mark. As a result of the VA Doctors continuing to deny that illnesses are associated to Veterans service, many veterans will continue to put off applying for benefits until it is their last option. In doing so it will take them beyond the current 10 years causing them to no longer be eligible for benefits they have earned and deserve.

Second Grant Service Connection as a result of service for ALS, MS, Parkinson's Disease and other similar Neurological Disorders. Today's doctors are trained to diagnosis illnesses. It is my fear that some veterans with very similar problems, and test results as mine may have very well been diagnosed with a Neurological disorder that looks and acts like something that it is not. Causing their claim to not be covered under currently law.

Require that all VA Doctors be required to undergo training that reflects current science. Not fiction from the past.

Continue a comprehensive VA Registry Exam. As veterans are returning from Iraq today some are now reporting ill defined symptoms as well. My own brother Cole is set to deploy to Iraq on December 1st I hope that he does not have to appear before you in 15 years to seek what he has earned and deserves.

In Closing if those on the panel to follow us are not ready to admit that Gulf War Veterans are ill because of our exposures, than allowing them to continue to decide research, treatment and compensation will continue use down the same road we have been on for nearly 15 years. The first step in fixing any problem is to recognize the problem is there.

Mr. Chairmen Thank you again for being one of our top advocates in Congress, you are a friend to Veterans, you have listened when others have turned there backs.

Michael D Woods joined the Army on Jan. 29 1989 served with the 101st airborne division Ft.Campbell Kentucky. Deployed to the Gulf War Theater of operations in Sept. 1990 and return May 1991. Since that time Michael has conducted a road march from Florida to Washington DC. To raise awareness of the illnesses suffered by Gulf War Veterans. He has held awareness rallies at the White House, VA facilities across the country, and the Pentagon just to name a few. Michael is a former National President for the National Gulf War Resource Center. He is currently rated by the VA as a disabled Gulf War Veteran.